

THE USE OF FEAR IN ANIMAL RIGHTS DISCOURSE: AN ETHICAL PRAGMATIST APPROACH

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Abstract

The debate on animal rights has been encouraging in the last decade since Peter Singer published his book. Various arguments have been advanced to show that animals have distinct rights when compared to human rights. Later the notion of equal rights was advanced in the accusation of speciesism leveled against human beings. In all, philosophers and activists have theorized about ethical, legal and religious issues on animal rights. Recently I read a paper that adopts language change and I think such is commendable. However, it is not out of place if one says these approaches had yielded little result. To my mind, this is the case because the debate has adopted the strategy of persuasion, respect and love; appealing to human conscience and rationality. In this paper, I argue that a better result will be achieved if there is a change of strategy from persuasion to fearfulness. This paper is in agreement with Karl Marx's argument that it is time philosophers changed the world rather than analyse it. The finding in this work is that fear deters humans than love. Many religious and nutritional literatures that encourage killing and eating of animals elucidate on the benefits to humans, therefore, to change the narratives, animal rights activists need to adopt the strategy of espousing the disadvantages of eating or killing animals to humans rather than to espouse how disadvantaged animals will be when killed. An exposition of literatures that adopted this strategy of fear will be done to show their pragmatic import. It shall then be seen that fear repels or makes humans to be cautious.

Keywords: Animal rights, Fear, love, Emotion, Ethical pragmatism

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to encourage animal rights activists to adopt a new approach in protecting non-human animals since previous or current approaches have not yielded expected result. Empathy had been introduced in many theories to prevent cruelty and death to non-human animals. This is informed by the belief that humans are higher moral beings that will be persuaded by such emotion. The failure of that emotion is the reason why I think a new emotion should be introduced.

The strategy of fear is proposed here and it is informed by the Marxian maxim that 'philosophers should abandon interpretations of reality and concentrate on changing it'. Karl Marx was fed up with traditional philosophers' approach to life in their attempts to describe the world because these descriptions seem not to have pragmatic value. His frustration was based on the fact that there are many descriptions which are incongruent with each other and as such people continue to live miserably and unsure of what life will become. He adopted the method of dialectics showing that there is inherent contradiction in life but with the hope that the end will be good if class struggle is eliminated. He thought that this class struggle will disappear if and only if, the oppress class will take up arms to overthrow the class of the oppressors. In essence, there is a need to fight

back or cause your opposition to fear you and retreat if one desires to live a worthy life. Invariably Marx is saying the fear of the proletariats by the bourgeoisies in a capitalist economy is the beginning of wisdom.

According to Subba, as expressed in the words of Michael Eneyo “fear is a beautiful consciousness with different forms. Fear is one of the driving forces of civilization, and it is a director of life”. For him, fear is mystery; fear is god; fear is superpower; an alert indicator; fear is courage; fear is also defined as an enemy of a person (2018:23). Subba goes further to say that “fear is beauty, a powerful weapon and a controlling mechanism. Fear is also defined as a super law and guardian of all activities” (Subba, 2014:13-19). The use of rational fear in discourse is known as 'Fearism'. This is a philosophical theory that pertains to the use of rational fear rather than brute fear to create caution or overcome obstacles in human affairs. It is an attempt at building fear within an argument to provide caution in relation to impeding danger. Desh Subba sees fear as an integral part of human life which can be explored for positive purposes. Fear appeals to human consciousness against harm, death, failure and the likes. Fear goes hand in hand with knowledge about a thing. The more one is aware about the negativity of a thing the more one has fear about it. The intensity of knowledge about different diseases will result to a higher level of fear on the causative agents. This convinced us that if one confronts cruelty on animals with fear of diseases they can cause, it will reduce or stop cruelty to animals especially by showing human beings that their interest is at stake. So, in *Animal Ethics*, there is a need to hap on the danger or destructive tendency of bacteria, viruses, trichinosis and reverse evolution as guiding principle against cruelty to animals.

In achieving the objective of this work, subsequent part of the paper will focus on literature review of past works on animal rights, to show how the concepts of love and rationality permeated them, secondly, exposition of philosophers' uses of the 'weapon' of fear and the third will dwell on the benefits of the strategy of fear and the fourth will be the conclusion.

Historical Review on Animal Rights Literature

Contemporary works on animal rights can be seen as a reaction against old literature and actions of human beings that have denigrated the place and nature of non-human animals in the world. Though biological studies have shown that there are striking similarities between human animals and non-human animals, this revelation has not deterred human beings from being cruel to animals that are members of the same universe, no thanks to religious beliefs and cultural practices that mandate the killing of non-human animals for the purposes of sacrifices and entertainments. The curiosity in advanced human health diagnoses and treatments is also a culprit in this maltreatment of animals. Of important mention is the view of both ancient and modern philosophers whose ideas rubber stamped this earliest belief and practices.

The views of philosophers are supposed to be dispassionate and objective given their methodology, orientation and expectations. It becomes troublesome when philosophers seem incapable of transcending their culture and biases. Pythagoras is reputed to have stopped the killing or maltreatment of a dog because he felt the soul of the dog is that of a friend and not because he believed the dog is sentient or that it is immoral to do so (Bruce,2010). His concern for fellow man rather than for the dog becomes the basis of prohibiting the maltreatment of animals. Descartes in the modern period sees animals as automata, capable of engaging in mindless behaviours and gymnastics even when these behaviours are not quite different from the ones human beings engage in (Thomas, 2020:999).

J.S. Mill following in the consequentialist tradition of Jeremy Bentham could have saved torturing and maltreatments of animals with his theory of utility, having placed good and bad in the purview of sentience (Mill, 1969:211). However, the position of these philosophers has been pushed to absurdity when life is measured in qualitative versus quantitative periscope. This led to the thinking that the quality of human life is more than that of animals and as such sacrificing them for human well being would be morally right. Utility is therefore reduced to comparison of qualities.

Immanuel Kant deontologist avers that “we only owe ethical duties to rational beings and animals are not included in that group” (see Gregor, 2013). However, in his attempt to save human life Kant pronounced that in order to prevent man inhumanity to man, there is a need to stop being cruel to animals. Since our constant cruelty to animals can become habitual to the extent that such behaviour could be transferred to other human beings. He concludes that it is only man that should not be used as a means to any other end; humanity should be an end itself thereby excluding other occupants of the physical environment like nonhuman animals.

It is the attempts to correct some of the above views that animal rights advocates armed themselves with both deontological and teleological ethical theories exploring the principles of love, intentionality and consequential rationalism to show that most arguments that encourage animals' cruelty are inappropriate or biased.

Animal rights philosophers have proposed different arguments to show that animals too have the same rights as humans. From the point of the environmentalists, every organism and plant has purposeful importance to the survival of the eco-system in general and humans in particular. According to the Convention on Biological Diversity in 2004 “Biological diversity – the variety of life on earth and the natural patterns it forms – is increasingly threatened by human activities” (2004:04). In recognition of this threat, the association has taken various measures to reduce the effects but of particular mention is the single-species conservation programme which is geared towards preservation of animal species that are rare or those that are endangered to prevent a situation of being extinct (2004:02). This approach involved persuading humans to refrain from killing such animals.

Aside the environmental worth, some animal rights scholars have argued that animals have intrinsic worth and as such their values are not reducible to their usefulness to others. In Tom Regan's opinion “any being that is a subject of a life has inherent worth and the rights that protect such worth, and all subjects of life have these rights equally” (see Lori Guen, 2017)

Peter Singer introduced the claim of sentience with his argument on utilitarianism. He argued that avoidance of pain or suffering is a binding factor between non-human animals and human animals. Humans do suffer, just like animals; however, it is noticeable that humans avoid pain while they inflict pains on non-human animals. This in Singer's opinion is immoral.

Korsgaard buttressed Singer's position when he asserts that “it is pain to be in pain. And that is not a trivial fact” (1996:154) In this wise, the fact that animals can suffer just like humans confer certain moral obligation on us to pity them as we would do to fellow human beings.

In spite of the above efforts of aforementioned scholars, the maltreatment of non-human animals is not abated. Appealing to human sense of love and sympathy for others, rational consideration of not engaging in actions that will indirectly affect human being has not yielded result especially with religious traditions. It is for this reason that I think a change in strategy is required.

Philosophy and the Strategy of Fear

It seems strange to talk about the concept of fear as a strategy in philosophical discourse especially when the issue of (animal) rights is being discussed. After all, Philosophers are supposed to be dispassionate and employed rational, moral and critical methods in their discourses.

Though fear is a form of emotion, yet it is not outside the realm of morality or rationality. Fear in Subba opinion is “a beautiful consciousness with different forms” (Eneyo, 2018: 23). He goes further to describe it as a form of rational endeavour because it is a product of knowledge. For him, “when we have knowledge about the potential of something (to harm us) the knowledge in turns generates fear about the thing” (Eneyo, p.23, emphasis mine).

Anaxagoras, an ancient Greek philosopher submitted in his theory of reality that nature is 'at the mercy of two forces: love and hate. In other words, reality is composed of a force of contraction and a force of repulsion respectively. He argued for a pluralistic universe, where things or units exist, but, this units are brought together to form different objects by the power of the human mind through love. And these units can be separated in different proportion by the power of hate. I interpret the power of hate to be in the same class with the power of fear since hate and fear have the characteristics of repulsion. Love and fear are seen by Fisher (2012:4) is parallel and as such they cannot be exercised simultaneously by humans. In other words, if you fear something you cannot love it at the same time and vice versa.

However, love and respect can go together just as fear and respect. The former is taking for granted but the latter can be problematic if not explained. An example that can suffice here is in religion where God, the object of worship is both feared and respected. God is feared because of the enormity of His power to destroy and respected because His care and help to humans. This symmetric between fear and respect is noteworthy because some may argue that if fear is adopted as a strategy on nonhumans by human beings it may scare them from taking care of these animals or it may lead to attempt to eliminate them totally.

Eneyo (p.64) allays our fears in his book that fear is a moderation of thoughts and actions. For instance, if we found an animal useful to the ecosystem but dangerous for eating it will make us to take precaution (have fear) in the way we relate with it, this can lead to further research in developing instrument of preserving ourselves or handling the animals rather than to eliminate it.

Robert Appelbaum describes fear as a polysemantic word with related terms like phobia, paranoia, panic, terror, horror, dread, awe, etc (2018:02). What these words have in common with fear is that they make human beings to be cautious or move away completely from the object that is responsible for their predicament. It is the pragmatic import of fear we are proposing in this work in order to achieve the goal of building a universe, less of discrimination and cruelty within the domain of animal rights.

There is need to mention that fear as an ethical tool is entrenched in traditional African ethics. This is why there are many acts that are termed as taboos. Taboo is way of inducing fear to deter humans from engaging in anti-social acts.

African Ethical Pragmatism

The debates on Environmental ethics and Animal rights in Western philosophy is making some headway for reasons that they are able to provide alternatives to natural meat and the enactment of laws to curb unnecessary killing of animals and environmental degradation. The concern of this paper is the lack of impact this debate is having on the African

continent. There is few or no law in most African countries to promote animal rights or environmental sustenance. The poverty in the land too is a factor for disobedience to rational persuasion. The source of protein open to many in Africa is natural meat. This makes it difficult to abandon it. Couple with the fact that religious beliefs too give certain instructions on when to kill different animals. It is in this regard I think that something extra-ordinary must be done to deter Africans from environmental harm. And the proposal here is the infusion of fear into this rational discourse. In traditional Africa, fear is a weapon in their ethical theorizing. This fear is embedded in what they call taboo. Taboos are tied to the apron of the gods as the detector and punishers of anti-social behaviours. According to Sophie Oluwole (1984-1985) “for the Yoruba, the gods are agents of moral sanction rather than authorities whose moral prescriptions man must obey.” (quoted from Balogun, 2013:110-1)

The implication of this is that, in Africa, moral codes of conduct are not the inventions of the gods, but since the gods are interested in human affairs, they help supervise man's compliance with these codes and appropriately punish deviance from them.

The theory of fear in focus here is rational fear; the idea of fear that is not paranoiac or based on pure myth but it is nevertheless based on a mixture of empirical fact and emotional suppositions. It needs to be mentioned that fear has been a tool in African cultures especially the Yoruba culture that I am familiar with. A little exposition of this methodology will suffice at this juncture before we proceed to how some Western philosophers also employed it in their philosophy.

Yoruba Ethical Pragmatism and the Adoption of Fear

One tenet of pragmatism is that the workability of an idea is a test of its truth. Pragmatism in this direction recognizes that idea can be lucid and consistent yet lacking practical value. Pragmatists believe that the important value of a claim is not its consistency but its ability to change our world views or meet our expectations about life.

Pragmatism has become an important tool in ethical system or theorizing because of the need in exploring human behaviours to achieve social goals. This is why Williams James a foremost pragmatist avers that functionality or usefulness of an idea is the yardstick of its truth value (1907:07).

The Yoruba people of Nigeria, one of the major ethnic groups, have adopted this pragmatic ideal in their ethical theorizing over the centuries. Segun Gbadegesin espouses this position when he argues that the Yoruba “are very pragmatic in their approach to morality, and although religion may serve them as a motivating force, it is not the ultimate appeal in moral matter (1991:82). Sophie Oluwole makes it explicit when she asserts that “for the Yoruba the gods are the agents of moral sanction rather than the authorities whose moral prescriptions man must obey” (see Balogun, 2013:110-1). By implication, the Yoruba are aware of the utilitarian consequences of immoral behaviour and the rationality of adhering to good conduct is not lost on them. However, in enforcing obedience, the fear of the gods is employed.

This is the case because the Yoruba believe that the gods are ubiquitous and impartial in their judgment. Ethicists leverage on this belief to disabuse people's mind about escaping punishment for disobedience. Since human police are not ubiquitous and do not possess the most effective instruments of discovering crime on time and delivering judgment without bias. It was reasoned that the approach of instilling fear will even prevent crime and as such will be better than inflicting punishment after the crime.

For instance, a Yoruba myth among the worshippers of Oya (river goddess) forbids them from killing Buffalo or eating it (Olusola, 2005:157-9). The story was told about how the goddess transform from a Buffalo (agbonrin) to human by shedding her skin somewhere in the bush. A hunter accidentally stumbled on this process and picked the skin. When the goddess came back she could not find the skin and this made it impossible to change from human to Buffalo. The hunter then revealed to the Buffalo that her skin is with him and unless she agrees to marry him, she will not get the skin back. The Buffalo and the hunter eventually married, but the hunter betrayed the promised not to reveal this secret. So, the Buffalo killed the hunter and went back into the forest but she could not transform her children. In order not to incur the wrath of the goddess, her adherents were forbidden from eating Buffalo since then. This myth is one of those developed by the Yoruba people of South-west Nigeria to preserve the environment and prevent cruelty to animals.

Michael Eneyo reported that in Efik culture (a minority group in Nigeria), a story was told that

if the skin of yams and other wastes are left (on the ground) till the next day without being swept, anyone who sees these waste will encounter a terrible day...Nobody likes to have ill or bad luck, so no one will intentionally do such things that will bring him bad luck. This fear of accumulated dirt informing ill luck assisted the Efik to inculcate the habit of keeping their environment clean at all times (2018:156-7 emphasis mine).

Adoption of Rational Fear in Western Philosophy

Employing rational fear in philosophical discourse to achieve a better society is not novel to this work. A deep look at the philosophical postulations of the social contract theory of Hobbes and the historical development theorized in Karl Marx's social theory are instances of the use of the concept of fear to achieve their goal of how a modern society ought to be organized. Hobbes described the pre-civil society as full of chaos, death and crisis ridden. For him, the state of nature which precedes the civil society was brutish, and life was short. And for this reason, human beings within such a situation chose an authority or government to oversee the affairs of the inhabitants. Hobbes argued that due to the ego and stubbornness of human nature, the best authority is a sovereign authority with absolute powers (Leviathan). When the power given to this authority was described as too much, Hobbes warned that any attempt to resist this power or authority will lead to a slide-back into the state of nature which is worse than any misuse of the sovereign powers. With this explanation, Hobbes created fear into the minds of people who may want to challenge the leviathan as he called this absolute power. To curry obedience from the citizens Thomas Hobbes created a leviathan who is feared with absolute power to deal with erring citizens.

Hobbes' proposal may be a product of his upbringing according to Peters Richard, who wrote an introduction to Hobbes' work (1962). Richard, reports Hobbes to have mentioned that “fear and I were born twins”. Peter goes ahead to say that “the fear of death was to dominate Hobbes life and thought” (Leviathan, p. 7). Hobbes himself writes that “the passion to be reckoned with is fear” (Leviathan, p. 111).

Karl Marx in his historical dialectics describes the pre-communist society as a state of conflict between classes who were opposed to each other. He avers that the capitalist society will be the last in which such conflict will exist. In the capitalist society are the class of workers and the class of the bourgeoisie, who are in opposition to each other. He predicts that if the life of the workers is

not made better by the capitalists, they will be killed and overthrown in a bloody revolution that will eventually give birth to a new (communist) society. Marx with this explanation instilled fear in the minds of the oppressors by informing them that if they do not take care of the welfare of the oppressed they are risking their own existence. Since then capitalism has taken different colorations with a focus on the welfare of the individuals or working class. This strategy of fear has helped the modern day societies to provide welfare packages for workers; as such this work proposes the same strategy to the community of animal rights activists and scholars.

Adams Smith rightly submitted that “it is not the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from the regard to their own interest” (2002: 127). The implication of the above quote is that human beings only do things because of certain benefit or to prevent harm coming to them. The rich class has since then constantly modified capitalism to involve workers' welfare and creating opportunities for some members of the working class to be elevated to their class. This development can be attributed as one of the reasons the capitalist society has remain firm in spite of known ideological problems.

Blaise Pascal's argument on why it is more rational to wager on the existence of God rather than the contrary is also instructive on the use of rational fear. Pascal, in his supposedly advice made God a judge and an accuser in His own court, thereby creating fear of inescapable damnation to an agnostic who decides to slide into atheism. This palpable induced fear is buttress by the saying the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. This “suggests fear as facilitator of our journey to enlightenment. In this sense, fear drives us to knowing God, not just for what we stand to gain but if we obey and respond to His call, but also for what we stand to lose if we ignore this divine invitation” (Eneyo 2018:22). Aside this, religions all over the world have adopted this strategy of making their Gods fiery and furious and intolerant of opposition as such many religious believers even in their poverty and sordid states hardly jettison religious commands that are not of benefits. This is one of the reasons why Karl Max and Machiavelli see “religion as a controlled mechanism because it aids trustworthiness and loyalty in performing public duties” (Ogundowole, 2004:46). Machiavelli therefore advises, that a ruler must believe in the religion of his subjects so that he can use this religion to control their minds or fight in order to win power or cling to it.

Machiavelli goes further in his choice of means to approve the use of propaganda that can make a ruler seems virtuous in the eyes of the citizens. Deceit to him is a method that is most effective in controlling obedience of the people. A ruler must appear virtuous even if he is not.

Ogundowole quoted Machiavelli as saying, “an army fight with morale as truly as with guns and the wise ruler sees that both are the best quality” (Ogundowole, p46). In other words, Machiavelli's political philosophy recognizes the need to use effective means to achieve a desired end. Ogundowole captures Machiavelli's argument as saying “it is useless and worthless to pursue a political purpose by methods that are bound to fail; if the need is to help the good, we must chose means adequate to its achievements ” (2004:42-43). For him, it does not matter whether the means is love or fear, however he argues that it is better for a ruler to be feared than to be loved. He chose fear because fear involves a ruler equipping himself or herself with characteristics that project fierceness. Since love depends on the characteristics of the person who is in love rather than the person being loved. So, it will be effective to build oneself than to rely on external capacity. It is because of the effectiveness of fear in these philosophical rationalizations that I have suggested the need for a change in approach to animal rights activism.

This strategy was used in a paper titled “The Chicken Fallacy and the Ethics of Cruelty to Non-Human Animals” to dissuade humans from maltreating domestic or domesticated non-human animals (Akande & Ofuasia, 2017). The paper argues that the cruelty to these animals may cause

them to become violent or developed genes that would make them a health risk in a future evolution. The recent outbreak of novel Corona virus named Covid-19 that is reported to have been transferred from animals to humans from a market in Wuhan, a province of China, is a confirmation that cruelty to non-human animals can be dangerous. The outbreak of this disease took many human lives to the extent that the world economy was threatened, businesses were closed, humans were isolated from each other, traveling was banned, all because of the fear of contracting the virus. Peter Singer too makes a similar stride in his work co-authored with Jim Mason “The Way We Eat: Why Our Food Choices Matter” where they expose the health risks of eating some animals and foods.

Fear in its various manifestations is a repellent; it can be used as a cause of change from a status quo. In other words, it can be used to make people hold on to the present in order to avoid a coming danger or to abandon the present danger and embrace a coming bliss.

Conclusion

Fearism as a philosophical theory has been adopted as a tool in philosophical discourses over the century as it has been shown from various works. The use of fear as we have shown here can be rationally employed for pragmatic reasons. William James who is a pragmatist holds that, an idea “is useful because it is true or that it is true because it is useful. And for him, both phrases communicate the same message”. (James, 1907:78). In respect to the above James avers that the functionality, usefulness or workability of an idea makes it true (1907:77). Consequently, the workability of a theory or argument in dissuading cruelty to animals matters only if they achieve their objective. The means to achieve a goal is worth pursuing to a pragmatist. It is for this reason this work proposes the use of rational fear in animal rights discourse given its achievement in other areas of philosophical discourse.

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